

Comparable results have been achieved in a number of improvement projects executed in New York and other U.S. cities by the Project for Public Spaces [4].

In residential areas as well, both in Europe and the United States, traffic reduction schemes, courtyard clearing, laying out of parks, and comparable outdoor improvements have had a marked effect.

In summarizing the studies, a close relationship between outdoor quality and outdoor activities can be noted.

In at least three areas, it appears possible, in part through the design of the physical environment, to influence the activity patterns in public spaces in cities and residential areas. Within certain limits – regional, climatic, societal – it is possible to influence *how many* people and events use the public spaces, *how long* the individual activities last, and *which* activity types can develop.

The fact that a marked increase of outdoor activities is often seen in connection with quality improvements emphasizes that the situation found in a specific area at a certain time frequently gives an incomplete indication of the need for public spaces and outdoor activities, which can indeed exist in the area. The establishment of a suitable physical framework for social and recreational activities has time after time revealed a suppressed human need that was ignored at the outset.

When the main street in Copenhagen was converted to a pedestrian street in 1962 as the first such scheme in Scandinavia, many critics predicted that the street would be deserted because “city activity just doesn’t belong to the northern European tradition.” Today this major pedestrian street, plus a number of other pedestrian streets later added to the system, are filled to capacity with people walking, sitting, playing music, drawing, and talking together.

It is evident that the initial fears were unfounded and that city life in Copenhagen had been so limited because there was previously no physical possibility for its existence.

In a number of new Danish residential areas as well, where physical possibilities for outdoor activity have been established in the form of high-quality public spaces, activity patterns that no one had believed possible in Danish residential areas have evolved.

Just as it has been noted that automobile traffic tends to develop concurrently with the building of new roads, all experience to date with regard to human activities in cities and in proximity to residences seems to indicate that where a better physical framework is created, outdoor activities tend to grow in number, duration, and scope.

## Notes

1. Gehl, Jan. ‘The Residential Street Environment.’ *Built Environment* 6, no. 1 (1980): 51–61.
2. Gehl, Jan. ‘Mennesker og trafik i Helsingør’ (Pedestrians and Vehicular Traffic in Elsinore). *Byplan* 21, no. 122 (1969): 132–33.
3. Whyte, William H. *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*. Washington D.C.: Conservation Foundation, 1980.
4. *Planning Public Spaces Handbook*. New York: Project for Public Spaces, Inc., 1976.

## Source and copyright

This chapter was published in its original form as:

Gehl, J. (2001 is fifth edition, first published 1971), ‘Three Types of Outdoor Activities’ and ‘Outdoor activities and quality of outdoor space’, in Gehl, J. (1996), *Life Between Buildings: Using Public Space*, Arkitektens Forlag, Skive, 11–16; 17–31; 32–40.

Reprinted with kind permission of the author Jan Gehl.